

Palmer (A.B.)



LETTER FROM PROF. PALMER

ON THE

HOMŒOPATHIC COMPLICATION

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

(From the PENINSULAR JOURNAL OF MEDICINE.)

MESSRS. EDITORS. — I reluctantly ask for a space in your journal for a personal statement of my own relations to the unfortunate homœopathic complication in the University, and for a short reply to various misapprehensions and unjust criticisms respecting the "statement" of the faculty as to the relations of homœopathy to the department of medicine and surgery. Neither your space nor my time will at present allow of more than a partial presentation of the facts of the case, reserving for the future, should occasion demand, a more full consideration of the whole subject.

In the first place, I wish to say, what all familiar with the facts know, that ever since the subject of the introduction of homœopathy into the University has been agitated, I have uniformly and firmly opposed it and everything which I thought might lead to it—and I have especially opposed with more vehemence than many of my friends thought judicious, any relations of this system to our medical school. Besides my own personal opinions and feelings respecting the system, I have known how deep was the general feeling of our profession against it, and how intolerant that profession would be of even the remotest relations with it. I knew full well of the "souverign and immitigable contempt," as Dr. Gross expresses it, of "every member of the regular profession" for the system and organization of homœopathy. I knew of the excitement which its establishment

at the seat of the University would produce, of the occasion it would give for rival schools to excite opposition to us; I knew of the mortification which would follow to our alumni and our friends. I knew of the disturbance of our peace; of the probable withholding of support and patronage on the part of some. I knew how any *intimate* association would ruin the school we had been so successful by long years of labor in building up; and hence, in the interests of advanced medical education, in the interests of our alumni, in the interests of the University in general, and especially in the interests of the medical department, this opposition has been kept up. My aversion to the whole thing has never abated, and is felt at the present moment as strongly as ever before.

The history of the act of the legislature and of the resolutions of the Board of Regents establishing the homœopathic college, so far as my relation to it is concerned, is briefly told. Sometime in February or early in March, 1875, I visited Lansing and conversed with several members of the legislature on the subject of homœopathy in the University, and respecting the bills for the establishment of a mixed Board of State Censors; expressing my opposition to the latter project, while I was assured by the friends of legitimate medicine in that body that there was no danger of the medical department being in any way embarrassed by any legislation, connecting us in any way with homœopathy; that if any thing was done it would be to establish an entirely separate school in some other part of the State, and from the general tone of feeling I observed there, I rested firmly in the conviction that the medical department would not be disturbed.

Not long after this, a meeting of the medical faculty of the University was called to consider whether any action could be taken in reference to the homœopathic question. A free discussion was held, and as usual, I strenuously opposed any action looking toward the remotest relation with it. Indeed no definite action was by any one proposed, and the general expression was as usual averse to any connection with it however remote. This was all that occurred in the faculty of which I had any knowledge up to the middle of April, when I left for Maine, not returning to Michigan until the latter part of July. For a knowledge of what occurred in the Legislature, in the Board of Regents, and in the faculty on this subject, during this interval, I am dependent upon the public records and the statements of others.

From these records I find the bill authorizing the Regents "to establish a Homœopathic College, as a branch or department of said University, which shall be located at the city of Ann Arbor," was approved April 27, 1875. The resolutions of the Regents establishing the details of this "branch or department,"—the first resolution being "that a Homœopathic Medical College be

established in the city of Ann Arbor," was passed May 11, 1875, and the first knowledge or intimation I had of such action as had occurred was by means of a letter from Dr. Sager stating some of the features of the action, but expressing no definite opinion as to its character or effect. I answered the letter, deprecating the arrangement in the strongest terms, expressing my surprise and chagrin, and about the same time wrote to the President of the University, who is also President of the Board of Regents, expressing at still greater length my surprise, my objections and regrets; but saying as the act was accomplished and could not at the present be reversed, I felt it my duty to stand by my post, so long as my liberty of expression on the subject of homœopathy was not interfered with, and so long as I was not called upon to associate in any professional way with homœopaths, or to recommend as fit for practitioners or for professional association homœopathic students. I was assured that no requirement of the kind would be made, and none has been, while my liberty of expression has in no way been abridged. I have performed my duty to the medical class as heretofore, teaching what I believed to be the true principles of medical science, and opposing, as I thought the truth and circumstances required, any views which I regarded as erroneous or absurd.

This is the exact history of this affair so far as I am personally concerned; and whoever contradicts directly or by implication any of these material statements, contravenes the truth.

I should not have deemed this account necessary had not efforts been made, at least by implication, to produce other impressions.

In considering the course and responsibility of the faculty, it should be borne in mind that the University of Michigan, or its Medical Department, is not a private institution under the control of its faculty, but that it belongs to the State, and is under the control of the people through their representatives, the Legislature and the Board of Regents. The members of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, while maintaining their positions as public servants, are bound by the authorities and the laws which are above them. Their only means of escaping from what this authority decides, is by resignation. Should anything be demanded of them which they regarded inconsistent with their honor or their duty to the profession, they would doubtless resort to this alternative. But no such demand has, in their estimation, been made; and to abandon their positions in the absence of such demand, would be, without justifiable cause, to turn the University over to the unopposed promulgation of a system of absurdity and folly. This, they are confident the profession would not justify them in doing, and this their own sense of duty has not allowed them to do.

It should also be understood and remembered that the mem-

bers of the faculty were scattered, many of them being away at their summer's work or vacation during these events, and were not all together until near the opening of the college in October; and as the commencement of the session approached, and numerous enquiries as to the relations of the new department were pouring in, those who were on the ground considered it their duty, in justice to the Legislature, the Board of Regents, the college and themselves, to put forth a statement of the facts just as they existed, without prejudice or concealment, to declare their own irresponsibility in the matter, and leave it for the authorities, the profession, and the public to judge and act as they should see fit. This is the record the faculty, as a body, have so far made, and by it they must be judged.

A few words in regard to the "Statement of the Relations of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery to Homœopathy":

Although this statement, after proper examination and discussion received the approval of all the faculty, who were in Ann Arbor at the time of its preparation (Drs. Ford and Dunster alone being absent), and was put forth by their order and on their behalf, yet it was written by myself, and for it I am quite willing to take the full responsibility, as nothing was put into it contrary to my wishes. It is true that some of the facts stated were derived from the testimony of others, but I have yet to learn that such testimony was incorrect, and I now with a full sense of personal responsibility, unhesitatingly declare *that every paragraph, every sentence and every word, so far as I know and believe, is literally, strictly and exactly true.*

The first proposition in the statement, which so far as I know, has been assailed, is, that the faculty had no responsibility in the enactment of the law of the legislature or in the establishment of the details by the Board of Regents. On this point, my knowledge is not personal, except so far as relates to myself, as I was in a distant State during the whole affair, but there is no record of faculty action assuming any such responsibility, and I am assured by my colleagues that no such responsibility was assumed; and this, together with the positive assertion of Regent Rynd, who was chairman of the committee of the Regents which had the matter in charge, must be considered as conclusive. It is true, as I am informed, that the portion of the faculty, who were in Ann Arbor, were called to meet the chairman of the committee to have the plan of organization of the Homœopathic College presented, and to hear what might be said respecting it. From this meeting, Dr. Sager, who was then Dean of the faculty, for reasons of which I have never been informed, absented himself—or if the expression be preferred, was in town, had notice of the meeting, but was not present. At this meeting composed chiefly of the younger members of the faculty, three of the older members Drs. Sager, Ford and myself, being absent, all

but Dr. Sager, out of the State, those present had this matter, as they state, sprung suddenly upon them, had not time for mature reflection, and in the absence of so many of the faculty chose to take no responsibility respecting what they regarded as a foregone conclusion, and neither assented to or dissented from the proposed action. That they did not dissent, some of them, I am authorized to say, now regret. But for this or any other individual conduct, these gentlemen are fully competent to answer for themselves, should they deem it necessary so to do. The President of the Board of Regents, informs me that Dr. Sager's objections to the plan of the Regents, if he then had any, were not known to the Board till so long after their action upon it that he was much surprised that any objections were entertained by him.

The next item in the "statement" of the faculty to which exceptions have been taken, is that in which it is averred that "the diplomas to be granted are different in title and character—those of the homœopathic students are to be designated as Homœopathic; the names of none of the faculty of the department of Medicine and Surgery are to go upon them, and of course the names of the faculty of the Homœopathic College are not to go upon those of the other departments." *This is simply and literally true.* But it is objected that the inference is, that the diplomas are to be signed as heretofore. This is not so stated, and is not a necessary inference. The Regents, it is true, made a provision for having all diplomas of the University signed officially by the President and Secretary of the Board alone, but I had reason to believe that there would be no objections to the members of our faculty placing their names on the diplomas as a sign of their approval of the degree, and as commending the candidate to the profession; and members of the Board of Regents have expressed their entire willingness that the names of the faculty should be placed upon the parchments; and it is expected they will be so placed. Where, then, is the misstatement in this?

But the most serious charge of misrepresentation is in regard to the following: "The faculty of the College of Medicine and Surgery does not recommend for graduation, and has no responsibility whatever in sending forth or licensing to practice (as was to have been done by the mixed board proposed by the State Society), homœopathic students, or testifying to their fitness to become members of the medical profession."

This too is simply true. The Medical Faculty *does not recommend them for graduation.* The Dean of the Homœopathic Faculty does that by the express terms of the resolution of the Board. The Faculty of Medicine and Surgery does not send them forth. The Board of Regents does that. The license to practice is in the Diploma and the Regents confer that—and in no sense and

in no way does the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery testify to their fitness to *become members of the Medical profession*. They are prepared to testify at any time and anywhere that men professing to believe the absurd dogmas of Homœopathy, are in their judgment, not fit to become members of the medical profession. Where then is the incorrectness of this statement, except in the prepossessed imagination of our accusers?

It is not said that none of the faculty teach these men certain branches, and certify to their proficiency or want of proficiency in such branches. On the contrary, in the very next sentence it is stated that such teaching does occur, and that such certificates are to be given, and no attempt is made to deny any responsibility which such teaching involves. The Professors of Anatomy, Chemistry, Surgery and Midwifery do lecture to these men, and I suppose will examine them, if so be that any shall come forward for examination, and will certify to their qualifications in these branches; but I am most happy to say that my colleagues are not asked to intimate "that these students are qualified to practice medicine or to be proper professional associates of medical men." I presume they would not do so if asked.

The students of the Dental College attend the medical lecture, and are instructed by the medical professors, but these professors do not pretend to judge of their qualifications as dentists, and take no responsibility in sending them forth as practitioners of that art.

But a great quibble (for no better term can distinguish it) has been made respecting the use of the word *privilege* as applied to the homœopathic students attending the lectures in the Department of Medicine and Surgery. The resolution of the Board making the arrangement, says, the homœopathic students "shall be entitled to all the *privileges* accorded to students in the Medical Department" respecting "instruction" in the branches not provided for in the Homœopathic Medical College; and following the language in the resolution of the Board, the President of the University who may be supposed to know the force and propriety of words, uses the term *privilege* in his official report on this very subject in precisely, the sense it is used in our "statement." From our point of view, and from every point of view it was a *privilege* granted to the students of the Homœopathic College to attend the instructions in another department, but this privilege entailed obligations which in the "statement" were indicated. If anything could demonstrate the weakness of the criticism on the "Statement" it would be a petty verbal quibble such as this.

I have chosen to make this reply to assailants entirely impersonal and have avoided impugning the motives of any; but I must now say that whoever hereafter, in the light of the subject as now presented, shall continue without recantation any state-

ments or insinuations of misrepresentations in the "statement" of the faculty, certainly on the points alluded to (and these are the chief and the only ones requiring attention) must be considered a *false* accuser.

In thus defending myself and my colleagues from unjust accusations, it is farthest possible from my intentions to take issue with those who would inaugurate any judicious movement for the removal of the relations with homœopathy which actually exist. That both the Legislature and the Regents, with doubtless the best of intentions, made a grave mistake in establishing these relations, is my most firm conviction; and that both will see the error and hasten to rectify it, is my most ardent wish. Opposed as the arrangement seems to be by a large portion of the homœopaths, and obnoxious as it certainly is to the great body of our own profession, the experiment having thus failed to give satisfaction to any, have we not ground to hope that as soon as it can be accomplished, the complication we deplore will be effectually removed?

Truly yours,

A. B. PALMER.

